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ABSTRACT

Michel Foucault's theories provide a way to understand the power dynamics often present in teacher-training, in which teaching assistants negotiate among various "knowledges" in order to develop a classroom teaching style that both honors and resists their training. In "The Archaeology of (Gendered) Knowledge" (by Scot Petersen), a graduate student discusses the difficulty of coming to terms with his own gender constructs while working within a gender-conscious writing program. In "Pop! Goes the Classroom: The History of Textuality" (by Laurie Nardone), another graduate student discusses how introducing popular culture as a serious subject of discussion into the classroom has the potential to subvert what the Department of English recognizes as textuality. Finally, in "Underlife and Teacher-Training: The Paradox of Leaving Room for Anarchy" (by Kathleen Ann Kelly), a writing program administrator reads the relationship between new teaching assistants and their supervisor through Robert Brooke's concept of "underlife." (SR)

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To Have or Have Not: The Foucauldian Quandary of Control in Teacher-Training

Kathleen Ann Kelly
Laurie Nardone
Scot Petersen

Introduction

"Just tell us what to do!" This oft-heard plaint of freshman writers is heard in teacher-training workshops as well. Just as freshman writers hope to learn some sort of formula for writing, so do many new teachers expect that they will receive a formula for teaching composition, and that all they have to do is plug into that formula. Moreover, at the end of their first year of teaching, a few TAs feel aggrieved, and say, "Why didn't you tell us [whatever--fill in the blank] about teaching before?"

New teachers thus too often construct themselves as powerless and without knowledge, and view the writing program as the locus of all power and knowledge. (We're defining power as the ability to decide what goes on in individual classrooms, and knowledge as the knowledge of composition theory and pedagogy.) Needless to say, this is not an ideal situation for teaching and learning. However, Michel Foucault offers a way out of this quandary. In Discipline and Punish and Power/Knowledge, he shows how ideology can make itself disappear and, as a consequence,

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seem "normal." When we apply this theory to a teacher-training program, we discover that, for the new TA, composition pedagogy (whatever brand practiced or privileged in a given writing program) has become the unassailable status quo. It seems unchallengeable because its nature as ideology is so invisible.

At Northeastern University, we have used Michel Foucault's theories about power/knowledge to help TAs foreground their anxieties about the lack of any teaching formula and, more important, to negotiate comfortable, informed stances in the classroom. As E. Kim Stone, Assistant Director of the Introductory Writing Programs, puts it:

> like Mr. Rogers, who invites the children who watch his program to be his neighbors, we invite TAs into our neighborhood--in the Foucauldian sense, we "discipline" them into being our neighbors.1

We try to teach TAs that, as Foucault says,

> Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never

1We are indebted to E. Kim Stone for many of the ideas worked out in this introduction.

> localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in a position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising that power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application. (Power/Knowledge 98)

Throughout teacher-training, we model what we believe is good teacherly behavior, and talk openly about how we "discipline" TAs through privileging our particular pedagogical "neighborhood." On the one hand, in order to ensure that our writing program has a consistent theoretical and administrative base, we consciously create an invisible system of power that guarantees its smooth enforcement. On the other hand, we attempt to undermine this system and to make visible the power/knowledge games that inevitably evolve in any community.

What follows are three talks from a five-part roundtable given at the 1992 College Composition and Communication Conference in Cincinnati. Each person offers a different take on the idea of Foucauldian power/knowledge,

and illustrates the tangled process of both honoring and resisting teacher-training--a process that new teachers then reconstruct in their own classrooms as their own students struggle with what it means to write.

* * *

Laurie Nardone, a PhD candidate at Emory University, graduated from NU with a masters degree in 1991.

Pop! Goes the Classroom: The History of Textuality

During the orientation sessions for teaching assistants, the teacher trainer tells the TA: "Be creative; you have so much freedom. Your classroom is your own. Create your own syllabus. Do whatever you want to do, but do this." The TA then tells her students: "I can do whatever I want to do, so you can do whatever you want to do. You have so much freedom. Look, this is America; I trust you. Trust yourselves, your creativity, your instinct; become empowered, but do this." And the student gives the TA an absent stare, and looks back at the chain of command, reads the writing assignment and says, "I am powerless." But because all students inevitably absorb pop culture at an exponentially faster rate that we do, they think again, and say, along with Wayne and Garth, "I am powerless--NOT. I have to generate something, and within

this discourse of this classroom, I should be able to generate some sort of power."

So the chain begins to move in the other direction. The student completes the writing assignment in his or her own way and says, "I did this." If the student is a woman, she might say, "I know this probably isn't right, but I wanted to do this. Is that OK?" And the TA responds, "Oh, of course; this is America. This is good. These are fine ideas, and it's really quite perceptive of you to use graffiti from the bathroom wall as your text. It's not what the assignment--i.e., I--called for, but it's cool, and since I didn't even do the assignment myself, it's better than what I have produced as a "powerful discourse," as a means of engaging that poem, that film, that essay . . . and do you mind if I write a paper about it?"

And the chain of power continues. The TA goes to the teacher trainer because she is so proud of her student; of course, she thinks she deserves a lot of the credit because after all, she is the one who empowered the student. She stops herself, though, because she is supposed to be teaching the sequence of assignments, but she can't bear teaching Montaigne. But then she makes some incomprehensible rationalization and says to the teacher trainer, "I know I wasn't supposed to do this BUT, I did, and my students did this, and we have all learned from it, and I wrote a paper about it." And the teacher trainer

says, "well yes, it's good, and smart, and I'm very impressed, but it's not what you were supposed to do but it's pretty cool, so why don't you take that paper and come to 4Cs with me and we'll have a roundtable about the whole thing."

And so we did.

Foucault allows us to locate the complex "net" of power relations that exists in the classroom, particularly in regard to the treatment of what we call "texts" and what we recognize as "discourses" within the confines of the products and processes being created within the composition class. First, as composition teachers, we attempt to give a kind of technical knowledge--a form of empowerment in itself--and in doing so, we intentionally or unintentionally pass on a textual knowledge--a canon. It seems to me that the chain of power necessarily rejects or subverts through modification that mode of textuality expressed by the perceived master discourse. And that rejection or subversion is often at the hands of "popular" or "low" culture--read nonacademic culture.

Like teacher trainers, TAs have their own textual agendas. For example, since I am interested in opening the boundaries of the accepted notions of textuality, I often invoke popular culture in my composition classes. Students come to the classroom, more often than not, with little experience in textuality--or so they think. However, once

students can locate their authority in the complex discourse of mass media (a discourse with which they are extremely comfortable), a poem, a piece of persuasion, or a short story seems much more manageable. Once we tell students to think about what they already know, they discover that they know more than they think--and sometimes, more than we do. In this way, I teach them to recognize their own relationships to the varied methods of textuality.

However, at first, the TA's authority appears totalizing to the composition student. My constant undermining of this authority (through constant invocation of varied "texts" such as The Simpsons, Terminator 2, Cosmo, or the lyrics of Public Enemy) subtly invites students to subvert what they see as a totalizing discourse. In effect, I have discovered the benefits of inviting pop culture into the neighborhood of the classroom. For example, in my first year of teaching, I taught a course titled "Writing through Literature." The course, a first-year requirement, focused on the use of texts in creating analytical academic prose. I distributed a paper assignment that asked students to consider the issues of race, gender, and/or class as it/they operated in two texts. As I expected, most of the students used a compare/contrast format to discuss two texts found in the required anthology. A few students invoked other assigned texts from the class "reading" list--editorials from the Boston Globe, a Simpsons episode, Blade Runner.

These students wrote admirable essays, but even these cultural texts, while popular, had become part of a canon, what I might call my personal canon, waiting to be rejected.

One student, however, confronted my "do-whatever-you-want-but-do-this" standard. He chose Langston Hughes' "Harlem" and an anonymous piece of writing reproduced in his end notes: "Niggers must die." Max's supplemental text was found in the third floor men's bathroom of the NU library. His peers, while amazed and disgusted by the violent and racist content of the text, were also shocked because racist graffiti, or graffiti of any sort, they insisted, was not "appropriate" for such an assignment. But after careful consideration, our group concluded that the bathroom text provided the needed accessibility to Hughes' initial question: "What happens to a dream deferred?" In addition, our discussion and Hughes' poem shed light on the xenophobia demonstrated by the bathroom text. We discovered that our preconceived notions of boundaries were just that--our constructions. Inevitably, this incident had infringed upon all of our accepted notions about "English" and "English literature." Max had crossed an uncomfortable textual boundary, and this discomfort raises a crucial question: do students--and TAs, for that matter--intentionally, or inevitably--set out to disrupt the discourse of knowledge given to them?

However, in the context of the Foucauldian paradigms within which I want to work, I realize that I have posed the wrong question. The power/knowledge chain paves the way to making us realize that boundaries are not hermeneutically sealed, but penetrable. We teach what we know; we should be grateful when in these efforts, this knowledge is subverted. Whether the process is intentional or not matters little. Instead, we might consider the constantly shifting locations of power in the apparent hierarchy of trainer-TA-student relationships. For as Foucault suggests in "Truth and Power," "We need to cut off the King's head" (121).

* * *

Scot Petersen had no teaching experience when he first came to Northeastern University. He graduated from NU with a masters degree in 1992.

The Archaeology of Gendered Knowledge

I came to Northeastern's teacher-training with a beard; today, I am beardless--and transformed.

Before coming to NU nearly two years ago, I had no teaching experience; I had no idea of what a "gender construct" was. I now know what one is, and understand how my own (male) gender is constructed like everyone else's by discourses of gender, power, and knowledge.

When I arrived at the English Department's teacher training workshop, I was full of assumptions about teaching,

as was every other TA. I thought we would be given a textbook based on grammar instruction and that we would be working with structured writing "modes"--the business letter, the comparison/contrast paper, the research paper. I felt confident about this approach, based on my own college and work experience, including work as a newspaper copy editor.

At the same time, I was afraid that I wasn't going to be respected by the students I was expected to teach. I had been out of school for five years and felt out of touch with students of the 90s. I didn't know what to expect--in fact, I worried most of all that my students might physically attack me. Given my inexperience, I wondered about filling the role of the authoritative teacher that I was sure my students had been conditioned to expect.

My reaction to my worries was a typically male one (and I use the word male here in Judith Butler's sense of gender-as-performance in Gender Trouble). I thought that I needed to create a stronger male identity. Though I was twenty-eight, I felt too young to command respect, and decided I needed to do something to help me reinforce my identity as a male authority figure. I also wanted to project the cool image of the wise young college professor who wore jeans and a tweed jacket with leather patches on the elbows.

I grew the beard the summer before the start of classes. When I got to Northeastern, my colleagues accepted

me as I was and assumed that I had always worn a beard. I felt confident that my beard would help me maintain discipline in my classroom.

The beard worked, but in a different way than I could have imagined. By the time I entered the classroom for the first time, I had become even more self-conscious of my role as a teacher, due in part to the department's overtly gender-conscious teacher-training program. I had learned that I wasn't supposed to make grammar or spelling or modes the focus of my teaching. I was required to teach a process of writing that was different from anything I had done. Moreover, I was soon to learn, it was wildly different from what my students were expecting. From the very beginning of the training workshop, TAs were asked to question traditional classroom constructs of power, authority and knowledge. We were supposed to encourage our students to pursue their own individuality, to re-center the learning process in their own minds. To that end we gave them difficult readings like Paulo Freire's "The Banking Concept of Education" and Adrienne Rich's "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision."

My problem was that I began to see my presence as a male in the classroom--a seemingly much older, bearded male--undermined the process in which I was trying to engage the students. The role I had so carefully chosen for myself was at variance with what I was trying to teach, and students

were keenly aware of the gap, making it nearly impossible for them to liberate themselves from my "oppression" long enough to unpack their own thoughts and rise to what I demanded of them in their writing.

It struck me during the teaching of "Writing as Re-Vision" that I was only vaguely understanding how Rich's essay would allow the students to transform their writing into a language of their own. "What did this all have to do with writing?" they asked. And I really couldn't give them an honest answer. Students became preoccupied with Rich's lesbianism, which led one of my students to stand up and yell, "It's wrong, it's wrong, it's wrong!," and another to write a paper claiming that Rich's poems revealed her possession by the devil.

My own position clearly wasn't helping. How could I, a white male, help students transcend the discourses of patriarchal language (a handy phrase that furthered the distance between me and my students), when their teacher and role model sported a black beard flecked with grey? I could have changed my sex, but my dedication to the learning process only goes so far. So I did the next best thing: I changed how I represented my gender. I re-created a new identity. In the sixth week of class, I shaved off my beard. I shaved off the mask, no longer comfortable hiding behind this second most masculine of signifiers.

I got immediate and unexpected reactions to my act of self-examination. Most of my colleagues were surprised, or shocked, or couldn't get used to it, and wondered why I had shaved. (Interestingly, they saw it as a symbol of loss.) At the time, I couldn't give a serious answer. My students immediately commented on it, joked around with me about it, which helped me to relax. Before, when I entered the classroom, I felt as if I were entering a doctor's examination room.

I don't know if my own disposition changed, but I began to feel as if I had entered into a paradox: at once newly "naked" and "exposed" while at the same time much closer to my students. I felt that the distance or barrier separating our respective roles had narrowed; and if shaving my beard had helped to narrow the gap even a little bit, then I had given my students a living example of the power to overcome gender constructs, something which they had previously viewed as beyond their control. (Subsequently, I have found that, beard or no beard, I have a higher acceptance rate of Rich among my male students, and a higher resistance rate among my female students. Perhaps my setting an example of a male demonstrating how radical change can come about due to "revision"--in this case, revising my face--was unsettling for them.)

One could argue that, in changing my appearance, in "weakening" my image with respect to my students, in

succumbing to the heightened gender consciousness of the Department of English at NU, I was merely replacing one system of oppression with another. However, upon reflection, I have come to see growing my beard as a last-gasp gesture left over from my earlier (overdetermined) role as a copy editor in the (homophobic) sports department of a Boston newspaper.

The new world of teacher-training and teaching in a distinctly post-structuralist, feminist-influenced writing program has made me acutely self-conscious of my gender. I feel all the conflicts of wanting to employ the new (to me) process theory, of feeling that I am somehow not allowed to be "male," of fearing to step on feminist toes. One particular training session comes to mind. We had spent a morning reading and discussing the successive drafts of a freshman's essay. Instead of dealing with grammar, sentence structure, and organization, we had applied a new critical reading to the paper, focusing on the student's problem with male identity. We learned how to encourage this young man to flesh out his argument and unpack his thoughts, to revise beyond his gender biases. My initial reaction was similar to that of the other male TAs'--the program was too concerned with consciousness-raising and not with "real issues." When we broke for lunch, the women went off by themselves, and quite a few men were heard muttering comments about male-bashing. But we came to realize that

gender is a real issue, and sometimes the only issue. It was only after we had spent time in our own classrooms that we were able to recall and understand that the workshop session had been titled "Responding to Student Writing"--not "How to Deal with Comma Splices." The gender consciousness inculcated in training had become foregrounded--and important to us. Seeing firsthand how our students were so deeply enmeshed in gender issues, how gender affected the classroom dynamic, quickly made it clear that holding up unexamined gender constructs helped students to revise anew. We realized that, in the training workshops, we were getting taught how to teach in the same way we were expected to teach our students. In focusing on traditional expectations of gender and authority, our training instructors (including other, experienced TAs) were challenging us to rethink our teaching priorities. We learned from each other and from ourselves, through trial and error, through taking a hard look at ourselves in the mirror.

Teacher-training served as a model for teaching; it did not tell us how to teach. The students I teach continue to ask me the same questions I asked as a teacher-trainee: "What does all this have to do with writing?" Such questions show that they have not yet come to see the big picture. At these moments, I realize how I hold power/knowledge over them.

So today I am beardless and transformed, but not bowed. Since shaving off my beard, I have discovered, along with my students, new ways in which to play with the image of my authority. I can advocate for Rich and I can laugh at episodes of Married . . . with Children at the same time. I keep my students guessing, challenging their expectations of accepted or traditional ways of seeing authority. Some days I dress up; other days I wear jeans; sometimes I go unshaven for days, like Don Johnson used to do on Miami Vice. I can be strict, I can be one of them. I try to maintain the image I still am interested in projecting--the cool college prof. I no longer have the beard--but I've kept the patches at the elbows.

* * *

Kathleen Ann Kelly, Director of the Introductory Writing Programs at NU, responded to the other roundtable participants.

Underlife and Teacher-Training: The Paradox of Leaving Room for Anarchy

We had our roundtable rehearsal this past Monday. We sat around a round table, in the middle of department traffic, reading aloud--too quickly, so the other panelists couldn't really pay attention; too low, so the Chair and other assorted faculty members couldn't really hear as they passed by. Or so it seemed to me; after all, I'm not

tenured, and I have a place to preserve in the particular chain of command that Laurie has described.

I had written my part in advance, in a vacuum, imagining what the others would say, thinking about what I would say in response. Needless to say, I had to rewrite my whole talk after listening to Scot and Laurie and the others--Kim and Carl--at our Monday meeting.

When Laurie told me--this was a couple of years ago--that she wasn't going to have her students read Montaigne, I understood. But what I didn't know at the time, and what I learned only this week, was that Laurie thought the writing program at NU was pretty conservative. Nor did I know, back then, that Carl had developed a "let's write a paper" project--partially in response to what he saw as the "radical" features of the program.

And if I had known that having a beard might have helped me to "discipline" unruly TAs, believe me, I would have borrowed one.

I hope I'll continue to get TAs like Scot, Laurie, and Carl, people who feel free to renovate the neighborhood--so long as they remember who makes the zoning laws. . . .

Of course, I'm not always thrilled by these flights of independence on the part of novice TAs. But I recognize that I ask for a certain amount of trouble. At Northeastern, our social-epistemic view approach to the teaching of writing makes "trouble" inevitable. After all,

I want new TAs to teach Paulo Freire not only because I think it's valuable for freshman writers to meditate on the metaphor of the banking concept of education, but because I expect their instructors to meditate on it as well. In Theory and Resistance in Education, Henry Giroux insists on a definition of resistance that includes

> intentionality, consciousness . . . that takes the notion of emancipation as its guiding interest . . . [that has] a revealing function, one that contains a critique of domination and provides theoretical opportunities for self-reflection. (109)

It is this kind of resistance any writing program administrator might welcome. I call into service Giroux's word emancipation with a good deal of self-consciousness here. It seems too grand a word for describing the everyday work of running a writing program. But it is not too grand a word for what can happen in a writing classroom.

I have gained a better understanding of the "subversive" behavior of TAs since reading Robert Brooke's article, "Underlife and Writing Instruction." "Underlife" is the term sociologists have given to (and here I'm quoting Brooke) "the activities . . . individuals engage in to show that their identities are different from or more complex than the identities assigned them by organizational roles" (142). These activities often take the form of undermining

institutional roles through resistance or ridicule. (One can see affinities between what Brooke is saying and Foucault's take on power.)

Brooke writes that "students disobey, write letters instead of taking notes, and whisper with their peers to show that they are more than just students and can think independently of classroom expectations" (141).

I say that TAs disobey, miss meetings and deadlines, and complain to their peers to show that they are more than just new teachers and can think independently of writing program expectations.

I try to anticipate such behavior by making visible what is invisible, by uncovering the systematic rules that underlie the formation of good teaching. One way I make things visible is to give Brooke's article to TAs, usually when they come to the end of their first quarter of teaching. After reading and discussing the article, TAs see the often exasperating behavior of their students in a different, and more positive, light. Then the TAs begin to talk about how they themselves act out subversive behavior that can undermine the power system of the writing program.

The paradox is that, by anticipating and accommodating resistance, by planning for it, I believe I co-opt TA rebellion to some degree. Not only that, I tell the TAs I'm co-opting them. A passage from Robert Scholes' Textual Power captures the essence of this approach. (The passage

can serve as a useful mantra for both teachers and WPAs.) Scholes writes:

> practice is never natural or neutral; there is always a theory in place, so that the first job of any teacher . . . is to bring the assumptions that are in place out in the open for scrutiny. (x-xi)

By the way, Brooke's article also helps me to understand my own behavior as a writing program administrator. The fact is, I disobey, spread sedition, and quarrel with my colleagues to show that I am more than just an administrator and can think independently of my department.

I'd like to end with a quotation that for me, sets the tone of what teacher-training is all about. You see, when it comes to training TAs, I long to be the instructor that novelist Robertson Davies honors in the The Rebel Angels: "to instruct calls for energy," Davies writes:

> and to remain almost silent, but watchful and helpful, while students instruct themselves, calls for even greater energy. To see someone fall (which will teach him not to fall again) when a word from you would keep him on his feet but ignorant of an important danger, is one of the tasks of the teacher that calls for special energy, because holding in is more demanding than crying out. (87)

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Abstract

Michel Foucault's theories provide a way to understand the power dynamics often present in teacher-training, in which teaching assistants negotiate among various "knowledges" in order to develop a classroom teaching style that both honors and resists their training. In "The Archaeology of (Gendered) Knowledge," a graduate student discusses the difficulty of coming to terms with his own gender constructs while working within a gender-conscious writing program. In "Pop! Goes the Classroom: History of (T)extuality," another graduate student discusses how introducing popular culture as a serious subject of discussion into the classroom has the potential to subvert what the Department of English recognizes as textuality. Finally, a writing program administrator, in "Underlife and Teacher-Training: The Paradox of Leaving Room for Anarchy," reads the relationship between new TAs and their supervisor through Robert Brooke's concept of "underlife."